

The Ballarat Naturalist

December 2017



Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture

The President, John Gregurke welcomed members and visitors including the Bedggood family and members of other field naturalists clubs. He briefly outlined the contribution that Stella Bedggood made to the club during its early years. Very few of the present members knew Stella Bedggood personally but we greatly respect the work she did for the Club. She was Secretary for many years and also Treasury and Vice President. Within the club she was most valued for her leadership and teaching.

She willingly passed on her botanical knowledge which she gained from Volume 1 and 2 of *Handbook to Plants in Victoria* written by Jim Willis. She used her knowledge of the local bushland areas to have the best parts of Enfield Forest reserved for conservation. Today these areas are part of the much larger Enfield State Park.

All members of the Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat appreciate Stella's contribution to the club and the community.

J Gregurke

Birds of the Box-Ironbark: Connecting Country's Woodland Bird Monitoring Program 2012-17

Speaker - Tanya Loos

Tanya coordinated the "*Woodland Birds Project*" for *Connecting Country* for several years. The aims, implementation and outcomes of this project and the inspiring organization that oversaw it, featured in her presentation. The project was initiated in response to the declining numbers of many woodland birds in the Mt Alexander region. It strives to ensure that these birds flourish again in the future.

Woodland birds were embraced as a focal species in this program for landscape restoration, for various reasons: they tend to use different habitats with their presence or absence often indicating habitat type and quality; they are classified as *Threatened*; they are part of the Victorian Temperate Woodland Bird Community, Birdlife Australia, with whom *Connecting Country* is affiliated, it has been shown that it is possible to harness the enthusiasm and skill of citizen scientists to achieve great results for birds.

Tanya runs many workshops and training sessions and often uses the question ‘What’s your favourite bird?’ as an ice-breaker. Her personal favourite is the Gang-Gang Cockatoo. She delights in watching families of these grow on her block at Porcupine Ridge in the Wombat Forest.

Connecting Country is a not-for-profit organisation established in 2008. It operates at a landscape scale to increase, enhance and restore biodiversity across the Mt Alexander Shire and surrounds in Central Victoria. The organization aims to support the 30 or so local Landcare groups, restore landscapes, monitor and evaluate land management activities and outcomes, and engage the community.

Connecting Country has an arboreal-mammal nesting-program focused on Brush-tailed Phascogales but Sugar Gliders love their nest-boxes too. There are four staff across at least five projects funded from various sources, with an eight-member Committee of Management, an Expert Advisory Panel and Steering Groups.

The organization’s on-ground works-program has been mapped for the current year, with the results of recent years’ mapping grouped together for comparisons. Part of Tanya’s role is to visit the properties of interested land-holders, undertake an assessment and write a management plan focused on improving the land’s biodiversity and habitat value. Also her role includes planting to bring back missing species, connect isolated patches of vegetation, weed control, fencing, habitat improvement and necessary maintenance. Other roles involve the recommendation that woody debris like logs be left on the ground where possible, and control of rabbit to allow tussocks to form and the under-storey to thrive. *Connecting Country* sources the funding for, and carries out these works.



Photo: Scarlet Robin

Much of her work was aimed at implementing the recommendations by Geoff Park of the ten-year *Woodland Bird Action Plan (Natural Decisions)* drawn up in 2013. The Action Plan initially identified five focal species dubbed the “feathered five”, all ground-foraging woodland bird species classified as threatened. This was later extended to include the Scarlet Robin and Dusky Woodswallow, two birds that were more commonly seen and better known by land-holders. The Painted Button-quail was also added briefly, but not enough data was collected



Photo: Hooded Robin

on it under this survey model.

The *Action Plan* described nine woodland bird zones across the Mt Alexander Shire that have varying weed problems, vegetation types, bird species and social capital. It lists 34 species amongst its Threatened Woodland Bird Communities and associated species.

Tanya described some of these species for us, using the common names rather than Latin names because, happily the common names for birds, are standardised, unlike those for plants. She told lovely stories about the birds, like the

Hooded Robins that like to sing on

moonlit nights, the Painted Button-quail that forage in circular areas, leaving “platelets” devoid of leaf litter behind them, the male Jacky Winters that draw a figure 8 with their tail feathers as they land and are affectionately known as “post boys” given their preference for perching, and the dominant Diamond Firetail matriarchs with their extra dots and their need for unburnt and ungrazed tussocks to source long strands of grass for nests.

The Brown Treecreepers, unlike their more common cousin the White-throated Treecreepers, often forage on the ground or along fallen logs than up trees and are almost exclusively found where there is plenty of coarse woody debris. They form super-groups where the males will feed the chicks of any family. Crested Shrike-tits shred bark off trees in search of sturdy bugs for dinner, and use their mohawk-like crest to scare off other birds.



Photo: Jacky Winter

Tanya’s bird monitoring program

has built upon several previous years of surveys. The program involves surveying 50 official sites using Birdlife Australia’s “gold standard” for monitoring: the 20 minute, 2 hectare method, once every three months in the morning and afternoon. *Connecting Country*

Four important notices about 2017-18 Syllabus events

- . **Feb 4 2018 Excursion to *Western Treatment Plant*** Depart 8.30am **NB** Arrangements for transport to Werribee will need to be made at the coming Dec. meeting or contact J Gregurke
- . Feb 4 2018 Fran Hanrahan's excursion and been postponed until 8 April 2018
- . March 24 Excursion Torquay (see Nov. newsletter)
- . **Erratum** in Syllabus: March AGM 2018 is on Fri. **2** March

has submitted 20,000 individual records to Birdlife Australia since 2010, featuring 164 species of which only 6 are introduced.



Photo: Crested Strike-tit

The 50 monitoring sites covered both modified sites (paddocks with and without revegetation) and largely intact vegetation in gullies and on slopes. We were shown detailed maps of the presence or absence of the target species and learned about how the reporting rates were calculated and compared across different years. The reporting rate of the Diamond Firetail had dropped from 4% to 1% between 2010 and 2016, but the rates, for Scar-

let Robins which depend on a complex understorey and for Dusky Woodswallows, are steady.

Another graph showing the average number of species seen in each season was also interesting. It highlights not only significant seasonal shifts but also often substantial yearly changes that showed the importance of regular, ongoing monitoring and the dangers inherent in using a limited amount of survey data to draw conclusions. With so many factors influencing bird numbers at any given time no one year or season accurately represented any other year or season.

In the near future, it looks like a Birdlife “Goldfields” branch will be formed and will hopefully help support the work of Connecting Country which will focus its activities on the Key Biodiversity Areas in its region at Sandon, Clydesdale and Muckleford.

Connecting Country has only achieved this work with the support of

landholders, volunteers, technical and expert advisors, local field naturalists, Landcare members, university students, partners, funders, their committee and staff, to whom Tanya expressed heartfelt thanks.

Report: Emily Noble **Photos:** Geoff Park *Natural Newstead*

Excursion to Chepstowe, Snake Valley and Linton areas

Led by John and Elaine Gregurke

By the time we reached Chepstowe the weather was warming and at lunch we sat in calm sunshine at Mag Dam Rec Reserve in Snake Valley. The wildflowers at places visited were magnificent. Our outing ended at the Memorial for the 5 fire fighters tragically killed in the 1998 bushfire near Linton - a very moving visit. Fourteen field natu-



Photo: Neville Oddie chats with club members. Wind turbines behind-

ralists attended the field-trip including Tony from Bendigo club. Mr Neville Oddie (OAM and long time conservationist and Aboriginal rights activist) welcomed us and then us showed just some of the many aspects of the property that reveal his exceptional knowledge and dedication to nature conservation issues. The Oddie family took up land around Chepstowe after the gold rush in 1860’s when large sheep runs were split into smaller units. First we visited a farm dam that had been retro-fitted with a second wall, to provide both shallow and deep areas and hence nesting material and habitat for Spoonbills, Ibis and other birds. Brolgas nest here in dry years. From here we had views of volcanic and sedimentary landforms, also exposed granite of Mt Emu which has major significance in local indigenous folklore. Neville explained examples of the complex interactions on the farm, which is known for its high Golden Sun Moth population its associations with Wallaby Grass, Robber Flies, Swallows and other birds.

We were keen to visit the site of plantings of Anchor Plants (*Discaria pubescens*) by FNCB members in 1991, across Bailey's Ck from the homestead. The Anchor Plants, now in profuse flower, line part of the north bank of creek. The Oddies have planted other native species along the creek, including *Melicytus dentatus* (Tree Violet), *Banksia marginate* (Silver Banksia) and *Bursaria spinosa* (Sweet bursaria).



Photo: Anchor plants on bank

The old bridge spanning the creek which is joined by Mt Emu Ck lower in the catchment and often floods the Skipton area, has buttresses built from local bluestone. An interesting *Pelargonium* species with pale flowers grows on the banks north of the bridge. On part of Bailey's Creek, old Red Gums were fenced off to encourage seedling growth



Photo: Anchor plant in flower

Next we parked at the Chepstowe Wind Farm where Neville outlined construction of the three wind turbines with 80 m high towers, and 50 m long blades made of balsa and fibre glass. The blade tips travel at up to 300 km per hour. The scheme generates power equivalent to the needs of 2000 homes and performance over the first 2.5 years has exceeded expectations. The towers were constructed at Wyhalla, and the nacelles imported from Portugal. Each 'windmill' cost around \$7 million and the landowner is paid a monthly rent contracted over a 25 year-period. The turbines are controlled remotely from

Germany but maintained locally, and electricity feeds into a local power line (which could not handle more than 3 turbines). There were 100 objectors to the wind-farm at the time of its proposal in 2010. Interestingly, no bird-kills have been recorded around the scheme and Brolgas are commonly seen to fly and feed between the towers.

The final visit at Chepstowe was to an extensive area of land that has been fenced off from previously intensive sheep-grazing, for grassland-restoration trials and demonstrations. Part of this area was devoted to species-establishment trials involving direct seeding of 50-

60 herbaceous species, scalping and burning treatments. Most evident survivors in flower were *Leucochrysum albicans* (Hoary Sunray), *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* (Common everlasting), *Craspedia variabilis* (Common Billy Buttons), *Eryngium ovinum* (Blue Devil), *Poa sieberiana* (Fine Tussock Grass), *Themeda triandra* (Kangaroo Grass), *Stipa spp.* (Spear grasses) and Wallaby grasses.

Although the project funding has ended, some observations and measurements continue. Also in this area, many roof tiles had been placed to allow shelter and observation of reptiles and other fauna. Under a tile we saw a Whip Snake with its dark head markings.



Photo: Direct seeding of native flora



Photo: White-lipped Whip snake

Walking north, we then entered an even larger area of ex-grazing land that, for 25 years had been fenced to exclude stock, and which is burned regularly to encourage native species regeneration. In this area we found an impressive number of species in flower, which have largely replaced the predominantly Vernal Grass Sword. These included *Goode-*

nia lanata (Trailing Goodenia), *Goodenia pinnatifida* (Cut-leaf Goodenia), *Stylidium sp.* (Grass Trigger Plant), *Veronica sp.* (Speedwell). *Acaena novae-zelandiae* (Bidgee Widgee), *Acaena echinata* (Sheeps Burr), *Kennedia prostrata* (Running Postman), *Arthropodium strictum* (Chocolate Lily), *Senecio glomerata* (Fireweed), *Convolvulus erubescens* (Pink Bind Weed), *Pimelia humilis* (Common Rice-flower), *Burchardia umbellifera* (Milkmaids), a small sedge *Centrolepus aristata* and several orchids including *Diuris basaltica* (Golden Moth Orchid), *Caladenia transitoria* (Bronze Caladenia), *Monotoca scoparia* (Prickly Broom-heath), *Caladenia pusilla* (Tiny Finger Orchids), *Caladenia moschata* (Musky Caladenia), *Boronia nana* (Dwarf Boronia).

Neville explained some of the difficulties of burning this area of grassland in the small window of opportunity during the year. He also mentioned the transfer of nutrients by grazing sheep from the

areas to higher places where they like to ‘camp’, and the remaining effect that this transfer has on promoting higher diversity in the lower less fertile parts of the fenced-off restoration area. He also mentioned that sheep grazing had wiped out the Myrniong (*Microseris lanceolata*) that had been here a main Aborigine food staple.

At our picnic lunch at Mag Dam Recreation Reserve we saw Hard-head Duck and other water birds, some bird boxes and a yabby trap. Also in the picnic area we found the environmental weed *Paren-tucellia latifolia* (Red Bartsia) and evidence of Redfin.

Then we travelled through farm and forest roads towards Linton, stopping four times to look at ground flora and trees. At one stop where firewood was being cut, Elaine showed us a male Spotted Pardalote near its nesting hole in the ground. Many herbaceous species were in flower and these are listed here roughly in the order in which they were first observed: *Burchardia umbellifera* (Milkmaids), *Arthropodium strictum* (Chocolate Lily), *Dianella revoluta* (Black-anther Flax Lily), *Leptospermum myrsinoides* and *continentale* (Silky and Prickly Tea-trees), *Indigofera australis* (Australian Indigo), *Lazula* sp. (Woodrush), *Daviesia leptophylla* (Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea), *Acacia myrtifolia* (Myrtle Wattle – thickened marginal vein), *Bossiaea prostrata* (Creeping Bossiaea), *Pterostylus* sp. (Tall Green-hood Orchid), *Leucopogon virgatus* (Common Beard Heath),



Photo: Special plant people

Caleana sp. (Duck orchid), *Caladenia transitoria* (Bronze Caladenia), *Caladenia moscata* (Musky Caladenia), *Chiliglottis valida* (Common Bird Orchid), *Corybas* sp. (Helmet Orchid), *Calochillus robertsonii* (Beard Orchid), *Lomandra multiflora* (Many-flowered Mat-rush), numerous *Thelmytra* sp. (Sun Orchids) in bud, *Pimelia flava* (Yellow Rice-flower), *Olearia lrata* (Snowy Daisy Bush), *Viola hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Violet), *Cassytha glabella* (Slender Dodder-laurel), *Microseris lanceolata* (Yam Daisy Myrniong), *Lagenophora gracilis* (Slender Bottle Daisy) *Acacia lanigera* (Woolly Wattle).

Our visit with Neville Oddie was a revelation to those of us who had not seen the property or experienced his enthusiasm and wisdom in managing land for conservation and production purposes. We greatly appreciated the time he devoted to our visit. Thank you John Gre-gurke for an excellent outing, which was well researched, and navigated, through a maze of interesting roads and forest.

FNCB Casterton Camp

Twelve members including Thurgoods, Hanrahans, Gregurkes, Elders, Dalmans and Arnolds headed to Casterton on the 27th October 2017 for the weekend, staying at various accommodations. All gathered on Friday evening under shelter at the sports ground to use the barbecue. It was a lovely evening until the strongest of wind fronts came through kicking up a cloud of dust and raining down small branches on the metal roof. We were stunned for a while until it was realised awnings were flapping in the nearby caravan park so the gathering was quickly but unfortunately belatedly abandoned to survey damage. Disappointingly campers belonging to Gregurkes and Thurgoods suffered damage and although they were philosophical about it, we couldn't help feeling disappointed for them.

Saturday commenced with everyone gathered outside Clarke Street Cottage before driving to the DELWP yard to meet Richard Hill accompanied by PhD student Danni, who had both generously agreed to guide us for the day. We amalgamated into the 4wds as we were told some tracks were sandy. Being in a convoy and keeping an accurate track of where we were was a challenge. The first stop was in Wilkin Flora and Fauna reserve at Mill Swamp which was overflowing across the track. Here a plethora of flowers in a variety of colours attracted attention. It was then off to Hurdle Swamp to explore further along the track. Numerous frogs could be heard calling. It was particularly rewarding to hear the Growling Grassfrog call and again note many flowers. Lunch was enjoyed where we had stopped on the track adjacent to a vacant bee hive site.



Photo: Fairiies Apron

After lunch the path was retraced to East Boundary Track and a stop where there were numerous mauve Fairies' Aprons *Utricularia dichotoma* in the ditch adjacent to the track. Next it was along an unnamed track west, off East Boundary Track, stopping where tea tree abounded near a wet area where broilgas had been seen but despite some exploring they were not sighted. However a sizeable long necked tortoise peeking out with one

eye from under its shell was seen and photographed.

The track ahead here was not driveable and neither were the sides so it was a long reverse back to the turnoff, before proceeding to near the corner of Corndale Road where a Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo nest

was being monitored. It was explained that to nest these birds need large hollows near Brown and Desert Stringybark trees, *Eucalyptus baxteri* and *Eucalyptus arenacea*. Richard explained that *arenacea* flowered strongly on a three-year cycle and *baxteri* in the second and fourth year meaning both were necessary. We heard how Danni's PhD study involved the use of sound monitoring using sophisticated recorders to develop



Photo: Pink Fingers

a method of how this could be used to track what was happening at nests. For Saturday evening ten members gathered for tea at the Albion Hotel while two members availed themselves of an offer to accompany Richard and Danni to another site on private property about 60km away near Powers Creek where Red-tailed Black Cockatoos nests were being monitored. Danni was to check nests and change recorder batteries while Richard looked for other nests. The birds' movements at this time of day are predictable and a sighting was probable. In fact many birds were heard and visits to both nests observed. The male flies in to feed the female then they both fly off to feed and drink. The time away is related to the stage of development. In this case for one nest it was 45 min.

The return drive was also interesting with numerous kangaroos alongside and crossing the road and at one point three deer crossing closely in front. Speed was reduced to compensate for possible presence of this wildlife and a sigh of relief breathed on getting back with no incidents.



Photo: Wannon R enters bottom left corner, Glenelg R centre right

Sunday started with a short drive and the 3.5k return walk along the Glenelg River to its intersection with the Wannon River. It was commented that this might take 35min but in typical Field Nats style it was more like 2 hours. The red gums along the way were spectacular but the lush

growth meant few native flowers poked through so, with slightly different focus to our usual, Bill decided to collect weeds. The result

was spread out on the picnic table at the junction and 34 weed species counted.

While there, the elderly owner of the adjacent property, Peter Leake, came by and introduced himself. He was proud of his land and keen that its nature with mature trees was maintained. Andy recalled that Peter had written a book about the river and Peter seemed quite chuffed that this had been remembered.

It was here that some members departed for Ballarat while the remainder went on to see Bilston's tree which is claimed to have the largest amount of millable red gum of any tree. The tree was certainly impressive, though not particularly picturesque as some had warned earlier in the day. It did take six members, finger tips touching to circle its girth. A large branch had broken off and this has been nicely surface-carved with native creatures adding interest.



This was the last stop for all except Gregurkes who were staying for the night. Some of us visited the Peter Francis arbo-retum at Coleraine and also Wannon Falls which were flowing spectacularly.

Photo:..Salmon Sun Orchid
Stylidium sp

It was lovely to see the Spring flower display which included: some of the plants we saw recently with SEANA in the Little Desert, some which we know from local areas and some which had plant identification books being well used as we encountered species not familiar to us.

Except for the damage caused by the wind on Friday, it was a great weekend. Thanks to John Mildren for the suggestion, Bill Elder for organising Saturday's leaders, John Gregurke for leading Sunday and everyone else for sharing their varied knowledge. As usual it was inspiring to witness the plant knowledge of our members being shared as species at each location were observed and identified.

Report: Peter Dalman Photos Les Hanrahan

December Afternoon Excursion

1.30 pm: Leave from the usual place and. travel to Mt Warrenheip

4.30 pm Meet at Lake Esmond carpark & Bbq facilities area off Joseph St. for Christmas breakup. Bring picnic and/or Bbq food

CALENDAR 2017-2018

December

- Fri 1 *Earthquakes and Volcanoes*: Gary Gibson, seismologist
 Sun 3 *Mt Warrenheip, and Lake Esmond for Christmas get-together*: F Hanrahan (See p.11)

January

- Tues 23 6.30 pm picnic and committee meeting at Les's

February 2018

- Fri 2 *Biodiversity in leaf litter*: Max Campbell, Pres. FNCV
 Sun 4 **8.30am** *Western Treatment plant*: J Gregurke, Club member
NB (See P. 4)
 Tues 27 Committee meeting TBA

Committee

President	John Gregurke	
Vice Pres	Fran Hanrahan	Val Hocking
Secretary	Emily Noble	John Mildren
Treasurer	Les Hanrahan	

Andy Arnold

Bill Elder

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Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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